Lawless Mexico and The Ungoverned Citizens of the Autodefensa Movement

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by

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Abstract

Mexico is ungoverned, on the verge of failing and local law enforcement cannot penetrate regions so crime ridden that lawlessness prevails. Self-policing militias known as ‘autodefensas’ are the exception to these claims, rising from municipalities exhibiting varying degrees of crime, indigenous population density and economic inequality. Yet none of these factors explain their origination because they are not necessarily indigenous, particularly crime ridden or display levels of poverty necessary to distinguish the regions where they are active from ones where they are not. Perhaps the autodefensa movement is best described as an armed form of protest designed to highlight societal ails legitimated by the 'genuine' ties indigenous people have to land. Precedent backs this claim because the Zapatista Rebellion and a social efficacy movement in Oaxaca opened the door to violent social protest in Mexico decades prior. Through the use of census data this contribution will distinguish between municipalities that utilize self-policing and ones that do not, comparing the effects of crime, proportional levels of indigeneity and economic inequality in Mexico.

I. Introduction:

Call it what you will, counterinsurgency, a war on drugs or the decay of all civil order in a state racked by crime, the self-mobilized citizens of the autodefensa movement don’t label the security situation in Mexico, they live it. Rather than play victim and become another homicide statistic among the several thousand reported each year, they formed their own community police, but why? On a national level a plurality of social protest cases coordinated by efficacy groups positively correlate to increased homicide rates and lowered voter turnout (Ley, Violence and Citizen Participation in Mexico, 2015). Increased crime and police corruption positively correlates to approval for vigilantism (Zizumbo-Colugna, Crime, Corruption and Societal Support for Vigilante Justice, 2015). Beginning arguably with the first arrival of Spanish conquistadores and lasting until 2013, self-defense is a Mexican tradition, especially in rural communities that have anti-federalist sentiment. It demonstrates that in the face of crime, members of marginalized groups take justice into their own hands. Or do they? Research suggests that this is not the case; vigilante justice does not take place in particularly crime-ridden municipalities or in ones with higher than average levels of indigeneity. Citizens of Michoacán prior to the autodefensa movement of 2012 reported apathy for their situation. Seventy percent of people surveyed in one study stated that they would seek out criminal help rather than from another governmental organization if faced with a 'serious' situation (Ochoa and Herrera-Torres, Societal Attitudes and organized Crime in Mexico, 2012). Conflicting evidence points out that economic inequality is the primary reason to take up arms against a growing criminal threat (Phillips, Inequality and the Emergence of Vigilante Organizations, 2016). But why would an individual with the propensity for organized violence, pro-state or otherwise, seek out community self-defense when they could just as easily join the drug trade? Most answers for why the autodefensas manifested in 2013 remain unsatisfactory to adequately capture this social movement. Must the explanation for the movement be so specific, such that it excludes the primitive needs of those unlucky enough to be swept into this conflict? Can considering the politicization of Mexico's rural peasant population

in broad base social movements that are legitimized by indigeneity rather than founded by it shed light on why rural communities would engage in community policing in Michoacán contrasted by self defense groups in Guerrero? Literature covering the trajectory of peasant rights following the Zapatista Rebellion states that indigenous people hollowed out a space to state their grievances at the national level through violent social protest. These same ethnic groups also engaged in vigilante justice through community policing. They were allowed to operate by invoking a clause in the Mexican constitution that places the power of sovereignty with the citizens of Mexico. I argue that the autodefensas in the state of Michoacán coopted the strategy of community policing popularized by groups in the neighboring state of Guerrero. The genuine ties indigenous people have to territory naturally justify the existence of vigilante groups and they have the efficacy to rouse an apathetic civilian population accustomed to crime.

This thesis will begin with a review of the characteristics of Mexican society that largely explain its current condition, including both crime and the expansion of rural political activity. It will also present a history for the origin of vigilante justice in Mexico and three theories that fail to explain why it became necessary. I will assert that these theories do not adequately explain this phenomenon through the use of geographic mapping and an empirical review of indigeneity, crime and poverty rates in the states of Guerrero and Michoacán. These two cases have the greatest amount of historical research and available data to negate prior theoretical work. Furthermore these are the only two examples of community policing that span several municipalities rather than being isolated to only one. This thesis will then examine the Zapatisa Rebellion and the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca, two violent social protests that utilized indigenous rhetoric to legitimate their actions. Finally I will present a novel theory for the formation of the Mexican autodefensas. It will explain why community policing was a rallying point for the citizens of Guerrero and Michoacán due to the psychological predilection to preserve territorial integrity.

II. Background to Topic: Criminal Maneuvering and Rural Democratization

Mexico as a whole is much less violent than other states in Latin America, for example Honduras has four times the rate of homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. What makes Mexico pertinent to the regional study of Latin America is the upward trend in homicides from 8.1 in 2007 to 23.7 in 2011 per 100,000, especially those related to drug activity and organized crime. Despite its relative unimportance by volume of homicides to the rest of its neighbors, the increase in public disapproval for social institutions due to crime interplays off of an atmosphere of over-exposure. In a survey of the New York Times utilizing a keyword search the Justice in Mexico Project yielded more results for Mexican violence than Honduras and El Salvador combined. It is worthy to note that the sum of these two countries' homicide rates is six times that of Mexico, roughly 110 inhabitants per 100,000 (Heinle, Ferreira and Shirk, Drug Violence in Mexico, 2014). The condition under which these homicides have taken place has likely lead to this level of over-reporting on the issue of Mexican crime.

This category of drug-related deaths accounts for the vast increase in intentional homicides in Mexico despite hazy statistical evidence. In twenty-four years the lowest number of homicides listed by the autonomous government census agency, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Geografía (INEGI) was 11,000. The highest was sampled in 2011 with over 25,000. In the six sources used for comparison, four of them reported double the proportion of 'crime-style' homicides in 2007 versus 2011. This change was accompanied with other results displaying the same cyclical crime wave, a decrease in 2007 followed by a spike leading to 2011 and a drop in 2013, (Heinle, Ferreira and Shirk, 2014). This same pattern was exhibited nationally, with regional increases in crime density culminating in 2013 with the northwest and southwest coastal regions of Mexico.

Fighting over drug routes leading to the United States between criminal organizations drives violent crime. These trafficking organizations rely on gang and smaller-unit criminal allies to continue their business that leads to what the Migration Policy Institute calls "unorganized crime". These groups thrive in areas with few civil resources and weak prosecution rates. Markedly the states most plagued by crime are ones in which drug-trafficking organizations are engaged in disputes over trafficking corridors, mostly in the northern border states but also in Guerrero a state in the Southwest part of the country, the home to Acapulco (Selee, Arnson and Olson, Crime and Violence in Mexico and Central America, 2013) the most crime ridden city in Mexico (Felbab-Brown, The Rise of Militias in Mexico, 2016). Much of the literature on the topic of self-defense forces involves the study of marginalized communities fed up with crime. Few articles have suggested that this happens with relative ease because of a push in recent years by sub-municipal governance structures to maintain a degree of autonomy.

Mexico is divided into three levels of political organization, federal, state and Municipal. The federal system delegates power to states for the regulation of municipal governance. In an emerging fourth level through 'rural regime change', villages make up the smallest level of governance, this sub-municipal category accounts for 85% of all politics in Mexico and expresses the highest level of political volatility. This is especially the case when provoked by corruption or oppositional debate that is often followed by political maneuvering against local 'caciques', economically driven strongmen. This fourth category is considered to be the 'most local' form of governance and often forms the foundation for grassroots movements, the topic this paper will discuss at length. The refined needs of these local governance bodies provide 'micro-institutional' foundations for broader resistance, alternative institution building and self-defense. They scale up to encompass entire regions because they do not remain solely at the sub-municipal level. These local systems are comprised of indigenous and 'non-indigenous' actors alike (Fox, Rural Democratization and Decentralization, 2007), making them relevant to the study of vigilante justice groups. This article points out that the most political action takes place in small rural villages devoid of state control. Furthermore protests and small scale political maneuvering often stays within one city or municipality. The self-defense movements in Guerrero and Michoacán are especially relevant to this topic because they spanned roughly half the territory of each state.

Other movements remained in a single locality and quickly faded after a specific social issue was handled (Garcia-Ramirez and Martinez, Public Security and self defense groups in Mexico, 2016). The following text explores the history of the self-defense movement in Guerrero followed by the movement in Michoacán.

III. History of the Autodefensa Movement

Thirteen of Mexico's thirty-two states exhibited some form of community policing during the 2000's, mostly dispersed in small cities throughout Mexico. The popularization of the autodefensa movement in Michoacán was exceptional because entire communities rose up to oust cartel influence (Heinle, Molzahn and Shirk, Citizen Security in Michoacán, 2015) or regain social legitimacy in some for or another. One author defines vigilante organizations like the Michoacán autodefensas as, "sustained associations of private citizens voluntarily seeking to illegally control crime or other social infractions in a planned premeditated way, involving force or the threat of force." (Phillips, 2016). Phillips also distinguishes between two general types of vigilante justice organizations, grassroots community groups and patron-funded groups. Grassroots community vigilantes normally have a groundswell of support lead by a few vocal individuals. If they are community police groups they oftentimes carry their own personal weapons. Patron-funded groups have interests unrelated to civil defense because they are sponsored by a businessman or some other figure with an alternative agenda (Phillips, 2016). This paper focuses almost exclusively on groups that claim to be grassroots organizations and although they have community-supporting aims they are still expressly illegal.

According to Felbab-Brown weakened government institutions left room for alternative forms of state-security solutions to take root. With tacit approval from the Mexican government and a history of diminished regional state control the autodefensas served as a propitious law enforcement fixture in Michoacán and Guerrero. These states form part of the Tierra Caliente, a region of Mexico where indigenous rates are allegedly high and the landscape is rural. Rules are established informally, or by "power brokers" known as caciques that are often businessmen, or in some other cases, the cartels themselves. In this context vigilantes step in to preserve the rule of law when local sentiment for law enforcement becomes hostile for perceived or real corruption and undependability. This could come as retribution for an egregious wrong or when a large group of people become distraught with lack of action, as a result anti-law enforcement sentiment may boil over into vigilante justice (Garcia-Ramirez and Martinez, 2014). In the case of Guerrero and Michoacán the student killings at Iguala and mass killing of members of the New Generation Cartel respectively, are two attacks related to the 'War on Drugs' that point to dramatic instability. Recent decreases in the levels of crime in Guerrero do not detract from the fact that for years it was the second most violent state in Mexico. The government essentially sanctions these groups because of the easy claim that the right of self-defense is enshrined in the Mexican constitution. The Union of the Pueblos and Organizations of the state of Guerrero (UPOEG) and the Mexican government are examples of state and federal entities that have legitimated the vigilante groups. Felbab-Brown states that the government

originally garnered mistrust for these groups, but without strong state institutions common sense dictates that they are purposeful for state security. Finally the Mexican government has already sanctioned militias to fight insurgencies in Chiapas the site of the Zapatista Rebellion and Guerrero (Felbab-Brown, 2016).

It is important to note that the law does not support these organizations because they operate extra judicially and are predominantly comprised of aggrieved citizens. It fits into a larger study of non-state armed groups which have evolved in recent academic research to include not only terrorists, but groups with parochial objectives, such as providing a low cost law enforcement capability. They can be hired out for private security purposes or co-opted by 'political entrepreneurs'. In this case they are known as community based armed groups and ideally would have community protectionist aims in 'alternatively governed spaces', although they also take the form of gangs (Schuberth, The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups, 2015). The particularly volatile operational environment for these groups forces them to navigate a very murky grey area where they are tacitly supported, but expressly banned by the government.

Indigenous community police forces were first introduced to Mexico in 1995 after the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas. These forces were unconsolidated until the Regional Coordinator of Community Authorities (CRAC) came to fruition (Grillo, Mexico's Vigilante Militias Rout the Knights Templar Drug Cartel, 2014). Some argue that the Zapatista Rebellion was the turning point in the Mexican process of democratization and that popular citizen mobilization has spurned advancements to the socioeconomic status of Mexicans (Gilbreth, Democratization in Mexico: The Zapatista Rebellion and Civil Society, 2001).

The strongest support for vigilante justice developed when community police appeared in three municipalities in the state of Guerrero, Mexico. The grassroots community police movement later expanded to ten municipalities and gained legitimacy even in mixed ethnicity communities. The Coordinating Committee of Communitarian Authorities (CRAC) often ruled on cases then assigned advice and community-oriented punishments designed to realign offenders with their neighbors. Their forces eventually numbered 800 community police and their success at crime fighting during the 'war on drugs' garnered them tacit support from the Mexican government. The legalities of indigenous movements such as this one are "grey zones" according to Sierra. In these cases states cannot impose rules but the organization cannot be subsumed into the government (Sierra, 2016). Although the groups struggled to gain legitimacy they still fall within the trend of post-Zapatista indigenous autonomy. As a whole the Guerrero groups formed as a response to crime during a time when Mexico was promoting indigenous governing autonomy.

Guerrero displays the country's highest levels of inequality and poverty, especially in densely indigenous regions where a multi-cultural history is steeped with the ability to self-organize political movements. Central to the debate over indigenous autonomy is the ability to self-police by invoking Convention 169 of the International

Labor Organization which recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples. They also invoke Article 39 of the Mexican Constitution that places the power of sovereignty with the citizens of Mexico (Sierra, Indigenous Justice Faces the State, 2016). Unlike Anglo-Saxon constitutions, Latin American constitutions are written from civil law that guides legislation by ideals rather than guarantees (Vasconcelos, La Raza Cosmica, 1948). This weakens the power the constitution has over the creation of comprehensive and fair legislation (Collier, Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas, 1994). In 1995 the authorities did not indulge the claims of the group to settle internal disputes under the article of the Mexican Constitution (Sierra, 2016) because there was no reason to adhere to it.

The Michoacán autodefensas are supposedly patron-funded by lime growers associations who benefitted from the chance to oust cartel influence. Largely business is better without a criminal organization asking for protection money or coopting agricultural practices altogether (Abarca, 2014). Michoacán is known for the Purpéchua people who resisted early colonization, and is a bastion for anti-federalist and anti-globalization 'backwardness' (Heinle, Molzhan and Shirk, 2015). It is also home to Los Caballeros Templarios, the current manifestation in an extensive historical regional presence of hyper-violent cartels. The first autodefensas emerged in rural, poor regions of Michoacán where federal and state authorities have little presence. They organized to retake the communities controlled by cartels claiming that they had original ownership rights (Heinle, Molzhan and Shirk, 2015). The figurehead of the Michoacán movement, Dr. Jose Manuel Mireles justified their existence by legal precedent and highlighted the need for collective action. The following is a collection of quotes from a speech made by Mireles at the height of the movement in 2013.

"The town that wants to wake up and raise itself is totally within it's rights. The same constitution in article 10 says clearly: whichever town does not have security and institutional protection for the purpose they were made, can legitimately arm themselves in defense of their rights, their property, of their life." "We are doing the work that the state government has not wanted to do or that it could not, by being involved with organized crime. The municipal leadership and the state government cabinet, including the congress, all are involved. Everyone from the government sector is contaminated by organized crime." "This is a social movement, not a war against the goverment or the military, much less against the state of Michoacán, despite its passivity and refusal to accept us. It is solely and exclusively against organized crime, against crime at any of its levels: municipal, state and federal. It is a movement against crime in any of its modalities, from robbery of a pin to kidnapping and execution. All types of crime are being eliminated and expelled from our region." "This movement has to grow, but only united can we do it, without involving political parties. Only the people can defend themselves because it is about life." "What we did was place ourselves in agreement and decided how we want to die. We all agree with only one thing: to die fighting, not like animals in a trail, not like lambs tied at the hands and feet." (Olmos, Michoacán: Mireles El Alzado, Proceso, 2013).

The autodefensa strategies evolved from detaining corrupt local police to establishing blockades to screen for cartel members, detaining them or engaging in altercations during security patrols (Heinle, Molzhan and Shirk, 2015). They evolved rapidly from small caliber weapons to eventually adopting a hierarchical leadership structure and high power weapons to rival those of the cartels. These weapons were often seized from the cartels themselves that were registered later with the government per an agreement signed in 2014 allowing the continued action of the autodefensas. After a period of time the state government legitimized the groups naming them the 'Rural Defense Corps'. This was proposed to be an alternative security solution that had mixed results (Muedano, Autodefensas se organizan al ‘estilo’ militar, 2014).

In the case of the Michoacán autodefensas it is better to avoid awarding them the title of ‘success story’ due to allegations that they were linked with cartels in the first place. The Michoacán vigilantes used the same legal precedent as the CRAC-organized groups in Guerrero invoking the 1917 constitutional rights of local, “...regulation and solution of internal conflicts”. However they step well beyond these legal parameters to deal with the outside threats of ‘hyper-violent’ cartels (Althaus and Dudley, 2015). The killing potential of the autodefensas cannot be denied in one altercation with the Caballeros Templarios they killed 30 cartel members and lost approximately 30. The insecurities rose until 6,000 federal authorities were sent to Michoacán to regain control of the situation (Althaus and Dudley, 2015). The federal apprehension restored federal influence to the region and had several lasting effects brought about by 'Plan Michoacán'. These included an eight-point plan enforced by the Mexican Ministry of Defense including recognition of the newly named ‘rural defense corps’ that forced further communication and registration of these authorities with the government (Hale, 2014). It resulted in the eventual arrest of a high ranking leader in the autodefensa movement on allegations of federally prohibited ‘military grade weapons’ along with 80 other vigilantes (Heinle, Molzhan and Shirk, 2015). The origins of these autodefensa groups certainly vary across geography and time but a collection of works explain certain aspects of their origination from a myriad of perspectives.

This historical narrative has included a summary of several articles from sources utilizing mostly public information and news articles. The following section includes theories for the origination of vigilante justice groups including state retraction caused by crime, indigeneity and income inequality. While each of the works mentioned include some factual information their theoretical conclusions often ignore certain fundamental facets of the autodefensa movement.

III. Theoretical Explanations for the Formation of Vigilante Justice Groups

Most authors would agree that the autodefensas formed because of some grievance that include examples such as, limited civil infrastructure, the preservation of indigenous culture, poverty or heightened criminality. While these theories do have factual basis, they overlook variables that have been displayed in former social movements in Mexico. The cloudy playing field of rural politicization and heightened insecurity create a conceptual puzzle for discussing vigilantism as neither are

particularly relevant in the municipalities home to autodefensas. This paper presents results that the municipalities where the autodefensas formed exhibit similar levels of crime, indigeneity and income inequality. Following a review of three inadequate theoretical perspectives this thesis will present contrasting evidence compiled using Geographic Information Systems software. Finally this thesis will cite two cases of violent protest to develop a novel theory that more adequately explains the origination of vigilante justice in Mexico.

A master's thesis published by the United States Naval Postgraduate School presents the notion that Mexico contains 'ungoverned spaces' caused by crime. It does not make the claim that Mexico is a failed state because of its fairly robust economy similarly to the above-cited author, Felbab-Brown. The presence of ungoverned spaces is particularly relevant in Michoacán because it has an extensive history of illegal economies and poppy cultivation. The thesis cites a process by which criminal territorial hegemony may be achieved by acquiring territory through corruption of local authorities. Cartels then gain financial support and oppress the population through 'terror'. Since governance in rural Mexico was coopted by the criminal element the Caballeros Templarios easily took control of the drug trafficking routes through Michoacán and gained criminal hegemony. Corruption of civil institutions then becomes exceedingly easy because the cartel has enough money and the will to control the terrain. Michoacán is rugged and poorly administered by the Mexican government and the law enforcement institutions that exist often work for the criminal groups. Abarca cites this corruption as the explanation for the emergence of ungoverned spaces when intolerable situations lead to mass citizen mobilization for vigilante security (Abarca, 2014). While the term 'ungoverned spaces' reflects the situation of cartel supremacy in Michoacán it ignores the fact that the Mexican government can deploy military and police resources to great effect. When deployed the government was able to gain control of the situation instituting 'Plan Michoacán' that costing $3.4 billion (Althaus, Dudley, 2015). The very notion that the Mexican government is capable of this level of regional action suggests that the space is not 'ungoverned' but that political mobilization did not call for immediate action.

An undergraduate thesis concludes that self-defense groups are most likely to arise in areas where indigenous marginalization is highest. This is because indigenous people rely on the members in their communities more and therefore have thick social capital. This is largely because the social capital produced by closely-knit, territorially attached indigenous groups experiencing marginalization has created societal values that do not hold state authority in high regard. According to Halcli, the state and criminal organizations are nearly one in the same because of 'tacit tolerance' for heightened levels of victimization. She views self-defense forces as another player in a civil war in which the state is attempting to regain control over its civil institutions in the face of a criminal ruling elite. Halcli posits that this conflict is likely to spill over to areas with higher than average levels of indigeneity, clustered largely in southwestern Mexico. In the case of Mexico grievances by indigenous communities gave way to the formation of self-defense groups. Halcli affirms her hypotheses with the same census data as this thesis but without considering the geographic hotspots of indigenous population

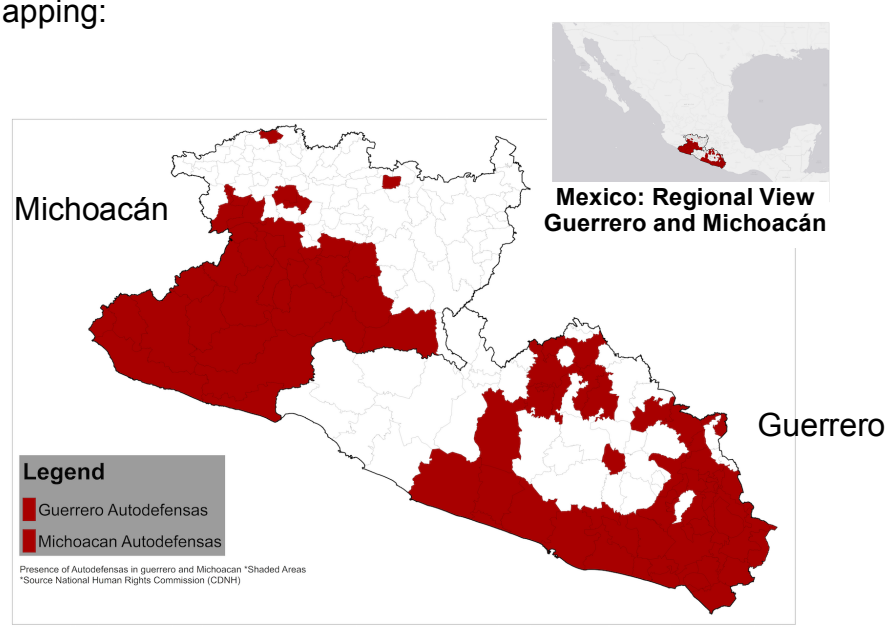
density. The average indigenous population overall is 10.44%, the average population for states without a presence of self-defense forces is 2.65% and states exhibiting self-defense forces 16.49%. Michoacán is arguably the most robust example of vigilante justice and only has an indigenous population average of 5%. This paper cites that as a populous state, the number of indigenous residents in Michoacán is still high (Halcli, Life that Thrives in Hostility, Undergraduate Thesis, 2015). The number of indigenous residents is secondary to the concentration of indigenous residents because norms of reciprocity that generate social capital are strongest at the local level (Pollini, 2004). Ultimately the research that Halcli presents is in need of geographic display at a more local level than an entire state. Vigilante justice takes place at the community policing level, allowing state-level statistics to predict an intensely localized phenomenon is not logically sound.

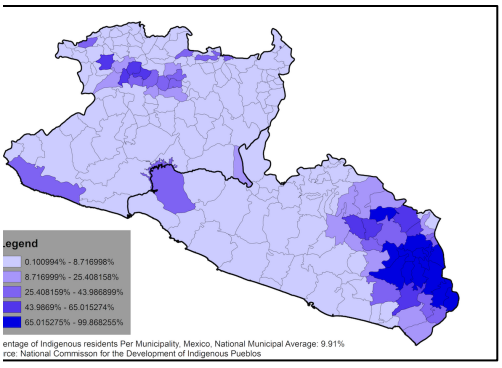
The following theoretical work proves that at the municipal level the presence of vigilante justice forces is most related to income inequality as opposed to crime or indigeneity. Phillips introduces the notion that relative deprivation of security driven by economic inequality is robustly associated with vigilantism. Poorer citizens look to vigilante justice to mitigate the security gap because wealthy citizens can seek out private security. Crime is a predictor of political participation (Ley, 2015; Phillips, 2016), but is also a form of political participation. Examining all municipalities with and without a vigilante presence shows that crime and rates of indigeneity are not statistically significant for predicting vigilantism. In state-level conditions of inequality private security is more prevalent therefore the grievances of poor citizens caused relative deprivation compel them to take up arms in the face of insecurity. Simply using crime as a predictor has a ranging effect because it insulates particularly high crime areas from vigilante justice but it also fails to explain why the groups operate in low crime areas (Phillips, 2016). In a logistic regression model, income inequality presents a coefficient of 10.78, homicide statistics 0.000 and percent indigenous population -0.027. Many issues persist with the conclusion of this paper despite the fact the descriptive statistics plainly demonstrate that economic inequality does outweigh any other speculation posed so far in this thesis explaining the origins of the autodefenas. Primarily the author ignores the evidence that crime necessitates private security, secondarily, economically deprived citizens with the propensity for organized action could simply take up arms and enter the drug trade, finally he ignores vigilante justice as a possible independent variable.

Each of these works presents theories for the origination of vigilante justice groups that center around grievances. Much of the scholarship on this topic runs parallel to what was presented above stating that regions where rule of law is less prevalent or marginalization is higher tend to have higher levels of crime often namely where cartels operate. These authors explain this phenomenon as a response purely to either crime, state retraction or to indigeneity, but fail to consider an alternative. Perhaps the movements themselves present a complex set of corrupted values, rather than the corruption that chips away at the rule of law of Mexico. The values of territorially immobile social groups who organize for purposes of protest or violent conflict explain why vigilantes rose up out of self defense in areas neither largely

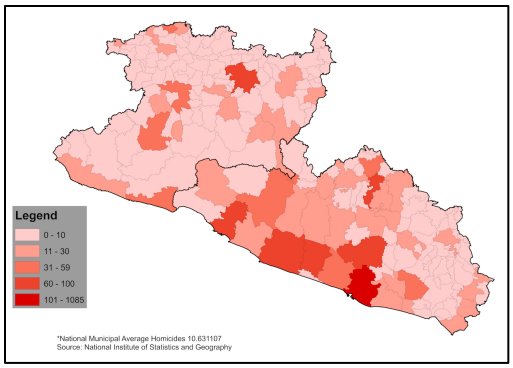
indigenous, nor violent. To test these notions and make way for another possible theoretical approach I gathered census data on crime, indigeneity and economic inequality. I cleaned the data for import into Geographic Information Systems to display heat maps indicating areas displaying heightened levels of each factor. To summarize the data I compared each municipality in the states of Michoacán and Guerrero that did or did not have a self-defense presence. These data are displayed in the bar graph below comparing each factor alongside the national average. To follow are critiques of the three theoretical explanations for the origins of the autodefensa movement: income inequality, crime measured by homicides and indigeneity.

IV. Data Mapping:

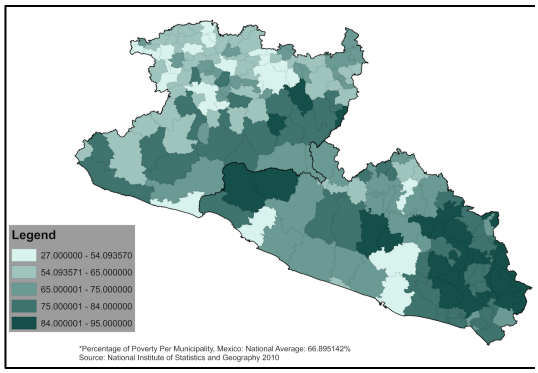




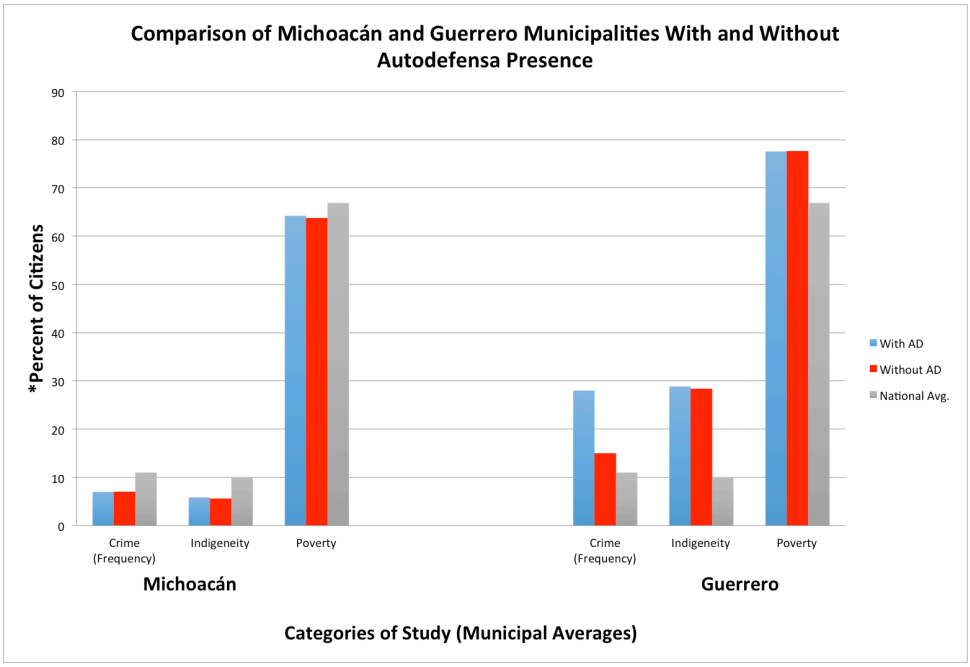
Indigeneity Hotspots



Homicide Hotspots



Poverty Hotspots



Michoacán				Guerrero		
With AD	Without AD	National Avg.	Societal Factors	With AD	Without AD	National Avg.
7	**7**	**11**	Homicides (Frequency)	**28**	**15**	**11**
5.85%	**5.58%**	**9.91%**	Indigeneity	**28.83%**	**28.35%**	**9.91%**
64.22%	**63.71%**	**66.89%**	Poverty	**77.56%**	**77.66%**	**66.89%**

***Data table depicting societal factors featured in above bar graph and plotted ArcGIS maps**

V. Discussion and Alternative Explanation for Autodefensa Movement

Income inequality is not an adequate explanation for the creation of the autodefensas in Michoacán or the vigilante justice forces in Guerrero because it is a constant in Mexico. The two states depicted above are rife with income inequality such that municipalities with and without vigilante justice have nearly identical levels of poverty. In both Michoacán and Guerrero municipalities with self-defense forces have poverty rates less than 1.5% greater than those that do not. The GIS-produced maps display heightened average municipal rates of poverty throughout most of each state. The Phillips paper concludes the poverty that creates relative deprivation of security resources is the strongest related factor to explain the origins of self-defense forces. Given that citizens with little money could join the drug trade and pay for private security resources, relative deprivation would not have a strong effect. As a whole I believe citizens wish to remain within legitimate society and though they may experience the effects of insecurity they are less likely to 'buy-in' to committing crime. The map depicting the location of vigilante justice forces in Michoacán and Guerrero show that they are present in swathes of territory in each state showing that there is widespread support for justice. I contend that poverty it is a constant throughout Mexico and therefore is not causational or predictive in explaining the origins of vigilante justice.

This evidence is supportive of the point that there is favor for vigilante justice, but it is not due to income inequality.

Crime is known to have a diminishing effect on state authority through corruption and creates disapproval for democratic institutions. Abarca and Felbab-Brown indicate that cartel influence in southwestern Mexico causes insecurity. This insecurity coupled with weak institutions and weak law enforcement resources creates the incentive for vigilantes to react by creating their own community police forces. To measure criminal activity I mapped hotspots indicating the frequency of homicides because it was the most complete data set. The figurehead of the Michoacán autodefensas, Mireles, does not specifically attribute one type of crime to their formation. However homicide represents a strong indicator of cartel criminal activity and is sufficient to debate the conclusions of previous theoretical work. In Michoacán the average frequency of homicides in municipalities with and without autodefensas is equal at 7. Acapulco, Guerrero is highly populous and particularly violent metropolitan hub so it inflates the frequency of average municipal homicides with 28 average homicides in municipalities with self-defense forces and 15 for those without. This makes it appear as though crime is a strong predictor in Guerrero, but crime hotspots cluster exclusively on the expansive southern Coast of the state. National data displays diminished support for democratic institutions and an increase for alternative political discourse (Ley, 2015). It also shows a slight increase in approval for vigilantism (Zizumbo-Colugna, 2015), but largely citizens of southwestern Mexico, specifically Michoacán have learned to live with higher than average levels of criminal influence (Ochoa and Herrera-Torres, 2012).

The remaining theory for the creation of the autodefensas is indigenous marginalization. In both Guerrero and Michoacán the average rate of indigeneity is only 0.5% greater in municipalities with vigilante justice forces than without. Though there are municipal concentrations of indigenous populations in Mexico they were never reported to participate in the autodefensa movement. Halcli states that the most likely predictor for the presence of modern vigilante justice is a heightened level of indigeneity and indigenous marginalization but in Michoacán that is simply not the case. Her theory could pull weight in the case of the Zapatista Rebellion because the movement was founded in the central highlands that exhibited an indigenous plurality and marginalization was high. The evidence this thesis is tangentially related to her conclusion because the idea of indigeneity carries significance in all cases of community policing. This is primarily because the end of the Zapatista Rebellion marked a time when indigenous autonomy became a subject of discussion in Mexico. It opened a road to democracy and was an instance where non-indigenous citizens of Mexico idealized indigenous culture (Gilbreth, 2001), something that continues today (Canessa, Todos Somos Indigenas, 2006). The following paragraphs will present a possible alternative theoretical perspective explaining the origins of the autodefensa movement and will reiterate the research question of this thesis after consideration of two violent social protest movements.

Canessa refers to the term ‘indigenous’ as, “...people with a primordial identity, an enduring attachment to place, and cultures which have continued over centuries and

millennia" (Canessa, Todos Somos Indigenas, 2006). Thereby these groups have a natural status and claim to authenticity and natural justice because they were there first. Most often protestors or members of social movements do not identify as anything other than a 'campesino', or a peasant but the opposite is true for cosmopolitan members of civil society. Politicians as well as these city-dwellers romanticize indigenous culture and attempt to retain the integrity of the values from which they borrow while making them accessible to the rest of civil society. International census statistics suggest that in certain time periods the number of people identifying as 'indigenous' doubled (Canessa, 2006). What is happening here? Canessa theorizes that borrowing from multiculturalism is a powerful way to make demands of the state, naturally giving a set of values indelible characteristics linking the movement to the land itself. He cites that movements such as these are 'inauthentic' (Canessa, 2006) a concept borrowed in later work on the topic that specifically narrates the Zapatista Rebellion and a movement in the Mexican state of Oaxaca.

The Zapatistas sought an end to revisions made to Article 27 of the constitution. The article would remove legislation that made land a commodity for the local Mayan residents. They also sought an "opened road toward democracy" and through the use of social warfare by autonomous units that were disruption causing agents, rather than destructive ones. The government in this case was thrown off balance when the Zapatistas took high profile targets, gaining supporters and sympathizers along the way. Theorists describe this as 'strategic public diplomacy', which is typically used to modify or secure foreign policy goals. The Zapatistas can then be classified as militant activists that attempted to shape beliefs and modify perceptions abroad (Ronfeldt, D., Arquilla, J. Fuller, G., Fuller, M., The Zapatista Social Netwar in Mexico, 1998). The Mayans living in the Central Highlands of Chiapas were marginalized and were often times second-class citizens to the local mixed-race Ladinos. The land reforms threatened land that was historically indigenous the group cited that the property truly belonged to their grandparents which had slowly been taken away by 'caciques' (Gilbreth, 2001). Unexpectedly the Zapatista Rebellion resonated widely with civil society and its cause was exportable to the likes of NGO's. Even consumer markets such as the United States press and Mexicans purchased Zapatista symbols, including posters and ski masks, typical garb of the rebels (Gilbreth, 2001). Why would the public, so far removed from the issue, perceivably without a grievance, who benefit from attempts to modernize the Mexican economy identify with rebellion?

The Zapatistas came from indigenous congresses that sought enhancements to inclusive regional governance. In the mid-1990's economic reforms and dramatized media releases highlighted how poor the region was and likely exacerbated their felt need for representation. Subcomandante Marcos was a large contributor to the overstating of the ethnic turmoil in Chiapas. His eloquent and highly politicized style of speaking lent itself to gaining widespread fame and garnered the movement an international audience. They earned the reputation of 'honest peasants' because many felt they were fighting for justice. Collier disputes this title because their marginalization was caused by stratifications at the local level not necessarily by the national government. In his work Collier never refers to the rebels as indians because some

indigenous communities did not buy into the idea of rebellion and gave the rebels labels like ‘thieves and trouble makers’. Furthermore not all of the rebels were Indians. Collier attempts to quash the misconception that they are simply ‘noble savages’ because the Zapatistas were not passive victims but a group that energized Mexican civil society (Collier, 1994). Along with heightened awareness for the plight of Chiapas’ peasantry, the Zapatisa Rebellion promoted a new wave of social movements in Latin America that used indigeneity as a means to propel a non-indigenous goal.

After a traditional protest, gathering teachers from across the state of Oaxaca was violently put-down by the state authorities, the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO) formed. It organized marches, blockades and alternative programming from the standard gathering over the course of the subsequent months. The APPO argued for political change on the basis of alternative governance for areas with heightened indigeneity (Norgert, A Cacophony of Autochthony, 2010). It gained strength from its meshwork of self-organized, decentralized decisionmakers. This made the protest flexible as well as resilient and produced a broader effect than a well-defined social movement would have (Magaña, Analyzing the Meshwork as an Emerging Social Movement Formation, 2010). The APPO platform spread to 19 different states in Mexico, emphasized self-defense and received international acclaim as American activists and news reporters began to draw heightened attention to the subject. What indigeneity brings to social movements is *moral* oppositional culture, which naturally attracts supporters (Norgert, 2010). Norgert explains that many actors began to identify as 'indigenous' because of the exerted mobilizing pull of what is considered ‘genuine’. She argues that scholars should perceive these groups with decreased dichotomization between ‘indigenous’ and ‘non-indigenous’, it limits the study of this topic because the boundaries between the two are blurring. In this case indigeneity is a resource cultivated by the politically savvy purely for purposes of political engagement to the wider public because it is naturally imbued with morality. This resource can be shifted to various conflicts because it is highly politicized, especially with the backdrop of globalization, it becomes distinct among many other social movements for its imagery, though it can be appropriated by various parties (Norgert, 2010).

Can considering the politicization of Mexico's rural peasant population in broad base social movements that are legitimized rather than founded in indigeneity shed light on why rural communities would engage in community policing in Michoacán contrasted by self-defense groups in Guerrero? Perhaps the autodefensa movement in Michoacán following the example of vigilante justice groups in Guerrero has similar origins to the two violent social protests listed above. After the Zapatista Rebellion people began to idealize indigenous culture and began to identify with indigenous protest to emphasize the importance of political causes. Canessa explains that indigeneity boosts the legitimacy of a cause because the original inhabitants of territory are the ones with the most genuine claim to making political decisions (Canessa, 2006). I argue that the rhetoric of the autodefensa movement plays on the human psychological predilection for place attachment. The promise of increased security through community cohesion, citizen participation and self-reliance explains why citizens would take up arms against an enemy embedded in civil society through corruption. The rhetoric would overcome

the apathy of a peasant population accustomed to crime and encourage them to take up arms despite incurring great personal risk. To present an alternative explanation for the formation of vigilante justice I will begin with a review of literature cataloging the importance of territory to political discourse.

VI. Discussion of Territoriality and Place Attachment:

The significance of territory has its foundation in state building through collective utilization of resources to attain the bare essentials to sustain life to attain the 'good life', In Gottmann's view each are facilitated by territorial ownership. The establishment of political order, security and collective bonds are most secure in a delineated space where ownership over frontiers becomes inseparable from territorial rights themselves. Within this logic, incursions to territorial sovereignty become synonymous with aggression towards individuals within the political space (Gottmann, The Significance of Territory, 1973). Territorial control describes the behaviors of states in relations with one another. Boundaries themselves carry weight in the international system because they regulate exchanges and separate social orders, sometimes naturally, but most commonly with a formal border (Kratochwil, Of Systems, Boundaries, and Territoriality, 1986). Non-exclusive territorial ownership in the pre-modern period was characterized as, "territoriality, in which authority was both personalized and parcelized within and across territorial formations and for which inclusive bases of legitimation prevailed" (Ruggie, Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations, 1993). Borrowing from Mattingly,1964, this was not a risk to state sovereignty because constituent political units viewed themselves as universally moral communities. Ruggie points out that the formation of civil society within a territory is autonomy of epistemes that form spheres of private spatial function. Private spheres of function bring into question loyalty to and practice of state formation, encouraging differential discourse and symbology. This means the empowerment of social units questions, "the terms of central rule, not the fact of it" (Ruggie, 1993). Finally the basis of civil society is on ironically cooperative, yet mutually-exclusive territorial powers. Unbundled territory result in non-territorial functional space that creates a state of anarchy, the social empowerment of epistemes results in the same question of rule today (Ruggie, 1993).

Humans are soft-wired to think about resources as elements of survival which exist in a space that are utilized to their full potential through ownership. The state system was designed this way for humans to divide their world into compartments, to guarantee survival. The very basic needs of life are supported by access to land thereby as humans we have the animalistic incentive to defend it violently (Vasquez, The War Puzzle, Territorial Contiguity as a Source of Conflict Leading to War, 1993). Often times we justify these claims by asserting ownership by giving control over territorial resources to the first ethnic group to make use of the land. This is the definition of autochthony and as a result ethnically indigenous residents are primordially linked to land, giving them a claim to its ownership on the basis of authenticity and 'firstness'. Autochthony is implicated as a practical use of violence because it highlights ethnic differences in order to make a stronger claim to ownership. It is also a fall back

for otherwise motivationally displaced individuals who in times of political uncertainty rely on ancestral ties as reasons for violence, especially vengeance for past wrongdoings.

Living and working within a community setting and being integrated politically enhances, “territorially characterized and subjectively perceived social collectivity” (Pollini, Elements of a Theory of Place Attachment and Socio-Territorial Belonging, 2005). When crime enters neighborhoods pride diminished, but it increases with the presence of local areas for people to gather (Mesch and Manor, Social Ties, Environmental perception and Local Attachment, 1998). Evidence also suggests that the more pride individuals have for their neighborhood reflected by the absence of obvious physical disrepair such as broken windows and physical decay can mitigate crime levels. Place attachment is directly related to greater social ties, especially between neighbors, whereas weaker social ties relate to increased vulnerability to crime (Brown, Perkins and Brown, 2004).

Community policing originally appeared as an indigenous phenomenon but was quickly adopted by non-indigenous people in response to crime in Guerrero. The aims of vigilante policing fall in line with post-Zapatista support for indigenous autonomy because citizens are in control of a normal function of the state. Given that neither indigeneity nor crime predicts the origination of community policing there must be another explanation. Another possible theory is the use of rhetoric that ignites the natural inclination for people to protect their home from outside influence. This is only possible in the post-Zapatista framework of increased identification with indigenous groups who are perceived to have a greater claim to alternative political discourse because of their 'genuineness'. Place attachment is a factor present between non-indigenous and indigenous actors alike and is not attributable to exclusively one group or the other. This would not necessarily be a source of variation that could explain the phenomenon because it is a psychological penchant shared by all humans. It would require the creation of a set of values to push past the natural inclination for people to cope with certain levels of criminality to avoid personal risk. These were present in the tenants of the autodefensas presented through rhetoric by the movement's figurehead, José Mireles.

He legitimized an episteme of autonomous private function by justifying the tactics of self-defense within the guise of the Mexican constitution. He stated, "...which-ever town does not have security and institutional protection for the purpose they were made, can legitimately arm themselves in defense of their rights, their property, of their life.” This could label the movement as a universally moral community with natural ties to the land that justifies action outside the scope of government control. He also pointed out the need for citizens to engage in collective action by stating " Only the people can defend themselves because it is about life." Collective action naturally creates more place attachment because it creates a social collectively that is strongest within a locality. Finally Mireles states that there is a certain degree of uncertainty in Michoacán because, "Everyone from the government sector is contaminated by organized crime." Autochthony normally causes members of the same ethnic group

would have the tendency to react violently in the face of uncertainty. In this case I would argue that the autodefensas took the moral high road when it justified its existence by stating that the government was too corrupt to protect its citizens. For the citizens of the autodefensa movement this would propel them to action because they view criminals as enemies of their sphere of influence.

The autodefensa movement was likely picked up strength from the self-determination it lent its members. Mireles states, "We all agree with only one thing: to die fighting, not like animals in a trail, not like lambs tied at the hands and feet." The fear of criminal influence in Mexico is overstated because of the brutal tactics used by the cartels. Perhaps the autodefensa movement was a form of violent social protest similar to the Zapatista Rebellion or the social efficacy campaign by the APPO. It sends a clear message that in spite of few government resources to combat cartel activity the citizens of the autodefensa movement will not play victim to criminal activity. The movement was also able to garner attention from the federal government as it sent in its own forces to control the evolving security situation. Finally it allowed the citizens of Michoacán to place trust in a new level of governance, sub-municipal civil groups that seem to more genuinely reflect the needs of its citizens. Attachment to place could explain the origins of the autodefensa movement because it crosscuts each of the original theoretical explanations. Humans have the natural tendency to take up arms when it becomes apparent a resource on which they depend for survival is being taken away. Perhaps the entire movement became popular because a vocal, charismatic actor was able to make a compelling argument for social action by creating the illusion of a looming threat. After the Zapatista Rebellion grassroots social protest movements drew a broad base of supporters because people continually question what makes a social group the genuine owner of a political space. In the case of the autodefensa movement this manifested itself as widespread support for vigilante justice through community policing.

VII. Conclusion:

In Mexico, the question of post-Zapatista indigenous autonomy exemplifies the formation of plural security priorities. Not of governance, but of self-determination; fundamentally access to the good life through territory because of solidified regional attachment to a territory. Though questions over rural economic struggles allude to the foundation of the autodefensa movement, the real question in Mexico is one of criminal influence, perceived or real, which proves to be a factor explaining citizen dissatisfaction with federal governance. Examining the autodefensas is really a study of autonomous epistemes, attached to place, self-reliant and motivated by intrinsically legitimate forms of protest which were made more viable in a climate of semi-security, rather than a backlash to intense criminality. Ultimately social mobility is the result of thickened social capital when grassroots supporters of the autodefensas clung to a tactic of self-legitimation, community policing.

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